United Nations A/59/93–E/2004/74

General Assembly
Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
11 June 2004

Original: English

General Assembly
Fifty-ninth session
Item 40 (a) of the preliminary list*
Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance: strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations

Economic and Social Council
Substantive session of 2004
New York, 28 June-23 July 2004
Item 5 of the provisional agenda**
Special economic, humanitarian and disaster relief assistance

Strengthening the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations

Report of the Secretary-General***

Summary

This report addresses the theme of "Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian assistance of the United Nations: present and future challenges". It examines some of the key humanitarian developments and challenges of the past year. Some of the key issues addressed relate to natural disaster management and the challenges of obtaining sustainable humanitarian access to populations affected by conflict. Developments on key humanitarian policy initiatives are also highlighted. They include updates on efforts to strengthen policies and actions related to the transition from relief to development, gender and humanitarian action, humanitarian financing and protection from sexual exploitation and abuse in humanitarian crises.

* A/59/50 and Corr.1.
** E/2004/100 and Corr.2.
*** The report was delayed for technical reasons.

04-38660 (E) 070704

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I. Introduction

1. The present report has been prepared pursuant to General Assembly resolution 46/182 of 19 December 1991, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report annually to the Assembly and the Economic and Social Council on the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance. The report is also submitted in response to the requests contained in General Assembly resolutions 58/114 of 17 December 2003, 57/153 of 16 December 2002 and Economic and Social Council resolution 2003/5 of 15 July 2003 on strengthening the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations.

II. Humanitarian developments, 2003-2004

A. Complex emergencies

2. The number of countries requiring humanitarian assistance as a result of complex emergencies in the past year has remained constant. Figures from the Consolidated Appeals Process (CAP) indicate that overall requirements for humanitarian assistance remain at approximately the same level as in previous years, with a total requirement of US$ 2.86 billion. Unfortunately, the pattern of funding of humanitarian activities remains uneven, leaving some countries substantially underfinanced. For example, while appeals for Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo were more than 35 per cent funded, countries such as the Central African Republic received only 5 per cent of their requirements in 2003. However, within this overall context, there were a number of developments that influenced both humanitarian assistance and related coordination activities.

3. The past year witnessed an increase in the diversity of actors providing humanitarian assistance. For example, more regional peacekeeping operations were deployed with humanitarian support tasks as part of their mandates, as demonstrated by the rapid deployments of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Mission in Liberia (ECOMIL) and the European Union forces in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which improved the overall security environment for humanitarian operations.

4. Other developments in the past year have been the increased engagement of private contractors in the management and distribution of relief assistance, and the direct involvement of armed forces in relief and reconstruction activities, often as a part of winning the "hearts and minds" of local populations in the global war on terror. These developments highlight the need to review and establish clearer guidance on civil-military relations and coordination.

5. Finally, the events of the past year highlighted a shift in perception and acceptance of humanitarian organizations by belligerent groups. The tragic bombing of the United Nations headquarters in Iraq on 19 August 2003 and the subsequent attack on the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) suggested the emblematic protection traditionally afforded these organizations was no longer recognized. The attacks on humanitarian workers in Afghanistan demonstrated that some belligerents perceive humanitarian organizations as taking sides, aligned with and supportive of particular political agendas. These developments oblige

humanitarian agencies to re-examine their approaches to security and their ability to maintain an effective, impartial presence.

6. Despite a shift towards peace in the West African subregion, there remains a serious crisis of protection with widespread and interrelated regional humanitarian consequences. While Sierra Leone is moving towards the consolidation of peace, various armed groups in the region remain a threat. The peacekeeping operation in Liberia has brought with it an end to active conflict in the country, yet the successful demobilization of armed groups will ultimately depend on a response that extends throughout the region. In Côte d'Ivoire, humanitarian access has improved owing to the deployment of French and ECOWAS peacekeeping troops, but more than 500,000 people remain displaced. The cumulative effects of unrest, massive displacement, depletion of food stocks, lack of access to land and the collapse of social services in these countries have affected other countries in the subregion. As a result, more than 340,000 people have returned to Burkina Faso from Côte d'Ivoire, straining the capacity of recipient communities.

7. The interrelated nature of the situation in West Africa underlines the importance of a regional response to better address regional cross-border issues that are of a humanitarian, political, economic and protection nature. These issues are being addressed by several United Nations agencies, which have signed memorandums of understanding with ECOWAS to build a strong partnership with its Department of Humanitarian Affairs. The elements of a regional crisis can become more apparent during the transition; therefore the regional approach to humanitarian crises should be continued into the planning of transitional responses as well. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee has formulated preparedness and contingency planning strategies that take into account the importance of dealing with the regional dimensions of and challenges to the effective delivery of humanitarian aid in the West African region.

8. Another continuing humanitarian challenge is the plight of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees. In the past year, the overall number of persons displaced internally as a result of conflicts and human rights violations is estimated at almost 25 million.[1] More than 3 million people were newly displaced in 2003, primarily in Africa. In May 2004, more than a million people became homeless in the Darfur region of the Sudan, when conflict erupted between rebel groups and government-backed Arab militias. Some 700,000 people were uprooted in the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo alone, following a flare-up of violence as a result of the power vacuum that was left by the withdrawal of foreign occupation troops from neighbouring countries. Intensified fighting in northern Uganda forced an equally high number of people to flee their homes. Other countries, such as Colombia, the Central African Republic and Indonesia, also saw major population movements.

9. At the end of 2003, there were an estimated 9.7 million refugees under the mandate of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), excluding 4 million Palestinian refugees in the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) area of operations. There is increasing hope that successful peace negotiations in many countries could lead to the voluntary repatriation of up to 2 million refugees and several million internally displaced persons. Prospects for peace in southern Sudan may well lead to the reintegration of many of the estimated 4 million internally

displaced persons in that country in what could be one of the largest return operations in recent times. This will demand substantial resources as well as coordination of the highest quality to ensure that all conditions for reintegration are made available. Despite the security problems that persist in parts of Afghanistan, almost half a million Afghan refugees and more than 800,000 internally displaced persons returned to their homes in 2003. In Africa, major repatriation operations began in Angola and similar operations were ongoing in Eritrea, Rwanda and Sierra Leone. Positive developments to resolve political crises in Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Republic of the Congo and Liberia led to intensive planning for refugee returns, and return is already taking place in Liberia and Burundi.

10. There is serious cause for concern that sexual abuse and sexual violence are increasingly becoming weapons of war. In the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, sexual violence against women and minors continues to be widespread. A network of local and international structures has been formed to address this problem through legal and therapeutic means, as well as through advocacy with both military and civil authorities. In Burundi, many women and girls have been subjected to rape and appalling acts of sexual violence, with many of the victims infected by HIV/AIDS. In northern Uganda, the persistent abduction of children and adolescents adds a further tragic dimension to what has become a forgotten conflict. Among those abducted are teenage girls, who are beaten and forced to be sexual slaves and fighters. It is estimated that between 10,000 and 15,000 abductees are being held by the Lords Resistance Army.

11. Humanitarian problems have increasingly become interrelated. The combination of food insecurity, HIV/AIDS and weakened capacity for governance, now commonly termed the "triple threat", have kept some 6.5 million people in southern Africa in need of emergency assistance. The 2003-2004 season has been another challenging one within southern Africa, with countries experiencing both drought and flood conditions within the same agricultural season. While general food distributions have been significantly scaled down, the most vulnerable groups continue to require targeted food assistance. The vulnerability of populations continues to be a concern and the effects of HIV/AIDS are particularly worrying. Close to 39 per cent of the adult population is HIV-positive in some countries. The disease is also rapidly assuming a young woman's face. In Africa, 67 per cent of people living with HIV/AIDS between the ages of 15 and 24 are female. The disease continues to take the lives of many of the most productive members of society, and decades of development have been lost while efforts to reduce poverty and improve living standards are undermined.

12. These developments demonstrate that HIV/AIDS interventions should be both better integrated into humanitarian planning and programming, including in vulnerability assessments, and should cut across humanitarian and development lines to focus on long-term solutions. This has been highlighted by the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Humanitarian Needs in Southern Africa and addressed in the recently revised IASC Guidelines for HIV/AIDS Interventions in Emergency Settings[2] — an important and useful tool for country teams to use in their humanitarian work.

B. Natural disasters

13. Natural disasters and environmental emergencies remain a global threat to the world's poorest. In 2003, 700 natural events resulted in 75,000 deaths and economic losses of more than US$ 65 billion. This death toll is almost seven times that of the previous year (11,000). One third of the deaths resulted from the Bam earthquake in Iran, which killed more than 26,000 people. Earthquakes in Algeria, China, Turkey and Morocco also exacted heavy human and economic losses, especially within urban centres.

14. Other types of disasters, such as floods, cyclones and droughts, reoccurred in vulnerable countries and regions. Viet Nam suffered serious floods in October 2003 for the fifth year in a row. In March 2004, Madagascar was again hit by a cyclone, which killed almost 200 people and left more than 200,000 people homeless. In May 2004, widespread flooding in Haiti and the Dominican Republic killed more than 1,500 people and displaced more than 16,000. Cyclone Ivy in Vanuatu and Typhoon Lupit in Micronesia in the Pacific severely damaged homes, crops and water systems and major flooding along the Huai and Yangtze rivers in China resulted in losses amounting to more than US$ 8 billion.

15. Recurrent drought throughout the Horn of Africa has blighted the region's environment over the past two decades and caused untold suffering for millions of households. While the latest drought cycle peaked in 2002, by March 2004 its effects were still impacting on 17 million people in Ethiopia and Eritrea and regions of Somalia. Extreme weather events, such as the heatwave in Europe, India, Bangladesh and Pakistan, claimed the lives of tens of thousands.

16. These events reinforce the need to invest in developing national preparedness and response capacities in disaster-prone countries. A comprehensive mapping of disaster hazards and vulnerabilities, combined with strengthened national and regional early warning systems, risk mitigation programmes and response organizations, would help improve the speed of response, strengthen response mechanisms and better target assistance.

III. Present and future challenges

A. Developments in humanitarian policy

1. Humanitarian financing and "good donorship"

17. As a follow-up to the 2003 discussion in the Economic and Social Council and the subsequent recommendations on humanitarian financing, the past year has seen progress in a number of areas under the Good Humanitarian Donorship Initiative. The key elements of the Initiative are to ensure that humanitarian assistance is more directly provided in accordance with humanitarian principles, backed by a commitment to provide funding in crises that is commensurate with clearly defined and demonstrable need. The Initiative promotes best practice among donors and facilitates improved humanitarian coordination through agreed definitions of humanitarian assistance, improved financial tracking and identification of resource gaps.

18. To this end, United Nations agencies have developed a framework to analyse, compare and present needs assessments consistently across emergencies. The CAP Needs Assessment Framework and Matrix (NAFM) is currently being piloted in Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. This tool should provide country teams with a transparent and consistent way in which to organize information relating to the needs of beneficiaries. Agencies remain concerned to achieve clearer agreement on how best to prioritize assistance requirements on both a geographical and a time-critical basis.

19. In addition, efforts at developing a commonly agreed definition of humanitarian assistance and its component elements are close to completion. This effort to ensure standardized reporting will more clearly identify overall flows of humanitarian assistance, lead to better-informed resource allocations and contribute to effective reviews of humanitarian performance. Donors of humanitarian assistance have already agreed to a peer review process within the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC), which will subject bilateral humanitarian assistance to the same levels of examination and review as bilateral development assistance. Good humanitarian donorship can lead to positive, clearer perceptions of humanitarian assistance and therefore is critical to reinforcing the basis for humanitarian presence.

2. The transition from relief to development

20. The Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs and the United Nations Development Group's working group on transition issues completed its work in December 2003. The resulting report focused primarily on the actions required to consolidate peace processes in countries emerging from conflict. The report, which was informed by eight country studies and extensive inter-agency consultation, aims to provide the basis for improved United Nations response to transition through more coherent planning, effective handover of coordination responsibilities and appropriate resource mobilization. The report concluded that there could be no standard response to countries in transition and recognized that effective transitional support requires an immediate response with regard to time-bound actions, failure to undertake which swiftly and effectively would jeopardize progress towards stability. Humanitarian relief activities will frequently run concurrently with long-term recovery programmes designed to re-establish or reinforce the institutions of State administration that are essential to stability and normalcy. It recommended the identification of common measures to support United Nations country teams in planning and identifying the main elements of a transition strategy.

21. The findings of the report recognized that the United Nations system is confronted with a number of challenges when planning its response in countries in transition. First, it found that the development, humanitarian, peacekeeping and political parts of the United Nations do not always act with a shared understanding of context and events and a unity of purpose. Second, it found that United Nations country teams sometimes struggle to find the right balance between quick-impact projects and longer-term, institution-building processes, particularly when there is limited capacity to implement them. The report concluded that a single coherent strategy for the United Nations system that supports greater coherence between political and operational efforts is necessary to strengthen transition activities. It also recommended that United Nations transition activities must also be field-driven from conception to implementation and based on a common analysis, a system-wide

assessment of needs and a clear identification of the potential role of the United Nations.

22. In response to this report, a standing mechanism comprised of the secretariats of the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs, the United Nations Development Group and the Executive Committee on Peace and Security, as well as a group of senior task teams, was established to provide continuing guidance and practical support to United Nations country teams engaged in transition planning. These bodies are exploring programming approaches, such as "the 4Rs" (repatriation, reintegration, rehabilitation and reconstruction) to help persons displaced as a consequence of violent conflict make the transition between relief and development. They will also work to ensure the smooth and effective handover of humanitarian coordination functions to national and international actors in countries in transition.

23. To meet such transition needs, adequate and timely funding of the United Nations response to transition is essential. The feasibility of adopting new, dedicated and multi-year funding mechanisms will require continuing dialogue with Member States to agree on a common approach. The planning and support to the transition involves the larger assistance community. Success will depend on the effective engagement of international financial institutions, donors and national authorities. While the collaborative effort on the development of post-conflict needs assessment has been positive, greater clarity and agreement is still needed between the United Nations system and the World Bank on their respective roles. The experience gained from the recent common assessment for the transition in Liberia and the subsequent appeal demonstrated the value of joint planning between the United Nations agencies, the World Bank and national Governments. Further efforts should be made to see if the good donorship principles developed for humanitarian assistance could also be relevant to transition.

3. Gender

24. Women and men experience war, displacement, floods and earthquakes differently and may have different priorities, responsibilities and protection needs. They can also mobilize or draw on different resources to protect themselves. There is growing recognition that a better analysis of how gender differences and inequalities influence the capacities and vulnerabilities of affected populations in emergencies contributes to the overall effectiveness of humanitarian response. Such analysis can also ensure that the planning and programming of humanitarian agencies build on existing capacities to respond to priority needs.

25. To this end, renewed efforts have been made to strengthen gender analysis in the common humanitarian action plans and to ensure that projects included in the CAP are in line with agreed analysis of priority needs and response. Following an evaluation of gender mainstreaming in the CAP, gender issues were integrated in the new CAP Needs Assessment Framework and Matrix with the aim of ensuring that organizations carrying out programmes within the CAP break down needs, capacities and vulnerabilities by gender and age when assessing needs and planning and implementing programmes. The CAP technical guidelines and workshop facilitation materials have been updated to reflect advances made in the needs assessment process.

26. Notwithstanding the progress that has been made, there continue to be serious gaps in integrating gender concerns into the humanitarian response. The systematic implementation of gender mainstreaming guidelines in field operations remains weak. The planning of humanitarian assistance can be further improved by the incorporation in each key sector of gender- and age-disaggregated data. Further analysis on the way programmes impact on women and men, and on girls and boys, need to continually inform programme design.

4. Protection from sexual exploitation and abuse

27. Sexual exploitation and abuse of civilians in humanitarian crises remains an issue of grave concern. A key challenge confronting the United Nations has been the prevention of and response to incidents of abuse perpetrated by personnel working for or affiliated with the United Nations and its partners, including both civilian staff and uniformed peacekeeping personnel. The Secretary-General's Bulletin of 9 October 2003 on Special Measures for Protection From Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse sets out minimum standards of behaviour expected of all United Nations civilian staff.[3] The bulletin defines sexual exploitation and sexual abuse and clarifies that such acts, particularly when perpetrated against beneficiaries of assistance, constitute serious misconduct and are grounds for disciplinary measures, including summary dismissal. In addition, the bulletin obliges all staff to report concerns or suspicions of sexual exploitation and abuse, and places the onus on managers at all levels to support and develop systems that maintain an environment that prevents such incidents.

28. The establishment of a complaints system at field level is the first step in ensuring a system of accountability. The United Nations will receive regular annual reports on all incidents and on the measures being adopted at country level to protect from sexual exploitation and abuse. A number of tools to assist in the implementation of the bulletin, such as guidance on investigative procedures, are in development. Follow-up measures will continue throughout the year.

29. Recent events in the Democratic Republic of the Congo suggest that there is a systemic problem in addressing the issue of sexual exploitation and abuse by uniformed personnel participating in peacekeeping operations. To facilitate efforts to prevent and respond to such incidents, Member States should incorporate the core principles enshrined in the Secretary-General's bulletin in the standards and codes of conduct for their national armed forces and police forces. Member States should also be urged to ensure that appropriate action is taken in response to allegations of sexual abuse and exploitation by their troops and personnel. Finally, donor countries should insist that all of their implementing partners include the core principles in their codes of conduct prior to the release of donor funding.

5. Protection of civilians in armed conflict

30. Experience during the past 12 months has demonstrated that some of the most critical aspects of the protection of civilians can best be addressed at a regional level. In West Africa, for example, cross-cutting issues, such as the movement of armed groups, jeopardize the civilian nature of refugee camps throughout the region and necessitate a regional response. In both the Great Lakes region and northern Uganda, the illicit flow of arms and the illegal exploitation of natural resources have sustained conflict and fuelled ethnic violence. These problems are not confined to

the control of States and require regional mechanisms and commitments if they are to be properly addressed.

31. Increasingly over the past year, regional organizations have taken measures to address protection concerns. Relevant initiatives include the African Union's decision to appoint a special representative for the protection of civilians in armed conflict, measures to better address protection issues taken by ECOWAS and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the timely deployment of European Union rapid reaction forces to Ituri in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in May 2003 and of ECOMIL forces in Liberia in August 2003.

32. Work to strengthen and enhance the policy framework for the protection of civilians in armed conflict among Member States has continued during the past 12 months. For example, the Member States Support Group on the Protection of Civilians has helped to generate broader support for the protection of civilians' agenda. The ECHA Implementation Group on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict has provided the basis for strong inter-agency coordination and a system-wide approach to the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

33. Coordination of protection has been strengthened by the joint development of various tools on the protection of civilians. This includes an updated aide-memoire[4] that reflects the latest protection of civilians concerns, trends relating to them and measures to address them. Closer coordination on protection issues has also been evident in the increased use of multidisciplinary assessment missions, such as the Joint Regional Humanitarian Field Review Mission to West Africa and a United Nations Secretariat review mission to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which will evaluate the relationship between humanitarian and peacekeeping organizations and their activities.

6. Internally displaced persons

34. To strengthen the international response to crises of internal displacement, in 2001 the Secretary-General established an Internal Displacement Unit. An external review of the Unit was undertaken in late 2003. The review noted that the Unit's effectiveness was linked to the overall effectiveness of the "collaborative approach", which provides the current institutional framework of response to crises of internal displacement. While there was wide commitment both within and outside the United Nations to this approach, the review concluded that more efforts are needed to make it work more successfully on the ground. Some of the obstacles identified were the lack of transparency and predictability in the decision-making process in assigning operational roles and highlighted major gaps in addressing protection concerns. Following the evaluation, operational agencies recognized the need for strengthened involvement and active identification of the measures required to ensure that the collaborative approach effectively meets the needs of internally displaced persons.

35. The Emergency Relief Coordinator is committed to strengthening the Unit, increasing the level of inter-agency engagement and ensuring more focused support to United Nations country teams from the Internal Displacement Unit. A number of "tools" to assist humanitarian coordinators and country teams in implementing the collaborative approach have been developed, including a procedural road map that lays out the assessment, strategic planning and response implementation steps to respond to crises of internal displacement. Close cooperation with the

Representative of the Secretary-General on Internally Displaced Persons and other partners, such as the Norwegian Refugee Council Global IDP Project, remains critical in ensuring a comprehensive approach that combines the operational response with advocacy and monitoring.

36. The Representative of the Secretary-General on Internally Displaced Persons and his partners have continued to promote the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement,[5] which have been increasingly recognized as an important tool for dealing with situations of internal displacement. This has resulted in a number of positive commitments on a regional level, which include the adoption of the Khartoum Declaration on Internally Displaced Persons in the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development Sub-Region in September 2003, decisions adopted by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in November 2003 and by the OSCE Ministerial Council in December 2003 and the framework of action decided upon by participants in a Latin American regional conference on internal displacement hosted by the Government of Mexico in February 2004.

B. Challenges for sustaining access in acute humanitarian crises

37. Sustained humanitarian access to populations and communities affected by conflict is critical to the effective delivery of material relief and protection. Tragically, in many of the world's current complex emergencies, access by humanitarian agencies remains limited and sporadic. It is estimated that more than 10 million people in some 20 countries affected by complex emergencies are inaccessible by humanitarian agencies.

1. Impediments to humanitarian access

38. Lack of security remains the predominant concern for the majority of affected populations and is a major obstacle to the delivery of aid where the security of humanitarian personnel is threatened. In northern Uganda, where the conflict has resulted in the displacement of some 1.5 million people, access to rural areas is severely limited because of insecurity and humanitarian operations require armed escorts. Other access constraints due to insecurity are evident in Burundi, the Northern Caucasus and Somalia, where attacks on humanitarian staff in the form of abduction and in some cases murder have occurred on several occasions. The specific targeting of the United Nations and the ICRC in Iraq and the attacks on humanitarian workers in Afghanistan demonstrate deliberate attempts to deny a humanitarian presence in these countries. Though it may be argued that these attacks were specific to the countries concerned, they have influenced the broader environment in which humanitarian agencies operate.

39. In addition, physical impediments have reduced access to vulnerable populations in many areas. In Angola, despite the end of the war, landmine infestation and unexploded ordnance have impeded the delivery of humanitarian assistance along key delivery routes and have hindered the return of internally displaced populations. Existing landmines will be a problem in southern Sudan as areas become more accessible. In the occupied Palestinian territories, the construction of separation barriers has become the greatest physical obstacle to humanitarian access and has severely affected the livelihoods and access to essential services of Palestinian populations. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo,

Liberia and Angola, the constraints due to war, underdevelopment and the weak capacities of Governments have resulted in the collapse of physical infrastructure, rendering millions of people beyond the reach of humanitarian assistance.

40. Finally, in some countries, political, procedural and administrative obstacles, including the issuance of visas and travel permits and onerous customs clearances, continue to be used as a means of restricting humanitarian access. In Eritrea, travel restrictions have affected efforts to provide timely and flexible humanitarian assistance. In the Sudan, the combination of a volatile security situation and cumbersome travel authorization and customs procedures has limited the scope of humanitarian operations to address the crisis in Darfur. These physical impediments to access will require more systematic investment to restore critical infrastructure within humanitarian operations and more effective dialogue with national authorities to address procedural constraints.

2. Perceptions and misperceptions of humanitarian actors

41. Humanitarian organizations have long held the view that maintaining a presence throughout crises depends on the understanding and acceptance of their roles and responsibilities by local communities and parties to the conflict. However, a number of developments over the past three years have changed the way in which humanitarian assistance is perceived and accepted. There is increasing concern that these developments will diminish the acceptance of humanitarian actors by local governments and populations and consequently impede their ability to remain engaged in acute crises and to deliver a principled response.

42. Foremost among these changes is a significant increase in the number and type of organizations that engage in humanitarian action. For example, recent years have witnessed a dramatic growth in commercial organizations' and military forces' involvement in relief activities, particularly in Afghanistan and Iraq. Traditionally, humanitarian organizations have worked alongside the military in areas of conflict and their respective roles and identity have been distinct. However, increasingly, some countries are including humanitarian activities in the mission mandates of their armed forces. In Afghanistan, for example, the United States-led Coalition and the International Security Assistance Force have introduced civil-military cells called Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) that are tasked with both security and reconstruction activities. The PRT approach has given rise to concerns that they have blurred the distinction between military and humanitarian operations and have compromised the perception of the neutrality of humanitarian assistance in areas where armed PRTs have engaged in the provision of relief. Lack of coordination between the PRTs and the broader humanitarian and development community has also raised concerns that humanitarian assistance is not being delivered where it is most needed. There are also broader implications if the PRT approach is applied to other areas of conflict.

43. Second, the development of new approaches to international security has affected perceptions between the humanitarian community and local populations. In recent years, the United Nations has applied a multidimensional approach to peacekeeping operations in a number of countries, bringing together the peacekeeping, political, humanitarian and development areas of the United Nations system. Currently, these "integrated missions" have been established or are being established in 10 out of the 24 complex emergency countries. Moreover, in some

areas, peacekeeping operations may not be under direct United Nations command, but may sit alongside a United Nations peace mission. Such developments have promoted increased bilateral assistance in support of interventions where either the military or foreign power engages directly in humanitarian activity. While such arrangements can create opportunities for more coherent and effective action, they also reinforce misperceptions of humanitarian organizations and their work. It is critically important that when there is a common United Nations identity, the activities of each of its components are distinct and appropriately applied.

44. Third, increases in the scale of humanitarian assistance as well as the manner in which humanitarian agencies conduct their activities, and their behaviour are having an impact on local perceptions and acceptance. For example, recent trends illustrate that humanitarian operations are increasing in size and value, with a commensurate impact on local economies. In some cases, such as in Somalia and Liberia, humanitarian agencies are one of the major sources of employment and a main source of economic opportunity in a resource-scarce environment. Consequently, the withdrawal of humanitarian activities can have an adverse effect on local employment levels and may result in increased security risks, particularly for the organizations that remain. In such cases, there is a need to develop an effective mechanism for consultation, to address grievances that may arise and take a violent form of expression.

45. To address these issues, the humanitarian community must better communicate its purpose and objectives to local populations, while also addressing the growth of military involvement in humanitarian operations and the nature of its relationship with the military, particularly the changing nature of that relationship as situations move from crisis to peace-building. This will require agreement on and communication concerning the respective roles and responsibilities of military and humanitarian actors and the basis for interaction between them. While such a basis can be found through existing guidelines, such as the Guidelines on the Use of Military and Civil Defence Assets to Support United Nations Humanitarian Activities in Complex Emergencies, further work is needed to better assess the role of military engagement in relief activities and its impact on the perception of humanitarian operations.

46. In addition, the humanitarian community must address the way humanitarian workers engage and interact with the population. Inappropriate staff behaviour can constitute a major source of risk and many security incidents are related to non-compliance with accepted, locally agreed security practice. Humanitarian organizations should also recognize that staff conduct and behaviour must be sensitive to the local norms and practices of their duty stations and directly address such issues. Where there is a significant international humanitarian presence, they might consider developing collaborative standards of behaviour and deportment.

47. Finally, improved collaboration among humanitarian agencies is required to address the perceptions that influence their safety and security, particularly as more fluid and dynamic threats increasingly require the continued development of enhanced security policy and procedures. Greater collaboration among humanitarian organizations through shared analysis and joint approaches to security can improve their ability to sustain a humanitarian presence in high-risk countries.

C. Building capacities for natural disaster preparedness and response

1. From international to national response

48. Actions taken during the first hours of a disaster are crucial to saving lives; the effectiveness of the response and the number of lives saved hinge on the speed and effectiveness of local response, particularly for earthquakes. Though in many cases affected countries are assisted by international search-and-rescue teams, which often arrive within 24 hours of the disaster, a properly trained and equipped local and national response capacity remains the most effective means of carrying out rapid assessments and coordinating the initial response. Local responders can potentially overcome several obstacles that can hinder rapid response, by, for example, setting up a coordination structure in advance and reducing dependency on outside assistance, which can result in the loss of valuable time. Further attention is needed to decentralizing search-and-rescue efforts and ensuring that vulnerable countries and regions can respond speedily to sudden-onset disasters in their proximity.

49. The response to the Bam earthquake illustrated the advantage of a fully capable national response capacity. In Iran, national authorities and the Iranian Red Crescent Society (IRCS) responded to the earthquake swiftly and effectively. The IRCS immediately mobilized 8,500 relief workers for a massive rescue operation. After the search-and-rescue phase was over, the IRCS played a major role in providing temporary shelter and distributing relief items.

50. In Morocco, while national authorities were the first on the scene and played the lead role in the emergency response to the earthquake, the Government also welcomed international assistance, which came in the form of a prompt regional response from Algeria, from United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) teams and from international teams from Europe, Japan and the United States.

51. The response to both the Bam earthquake and the earthquake in Morocco demonstrates that investing in local capacities not only leads to swift action and a solid logistical network, but also helps promote a stronger national role in international and regional response coordination when dozens of assistance groups rush to the field. The quick decision of the Government of Iran to request international assistance, together with simplified entry and custom procedures, led to swift and generous support.

52. To assist and support national response capacity, the United Nations system is working to strengthen and develop a variety of disaster response tools. It continues to strengthen its existing tools, including on-site operations and coordination centres, the UNDAC and International Search and Rescue Advisory Group networks and the United Nations Humanitarian Response Depot in Brindisi, Italy, and to support and streamline common services such as the United Nations Humanitarian Air Service, the United Nations Joint Logistic Centre, humanitarian information centres and joint information networks. In addition, the United Nations is developing an Internet-based operational alert system for earthquakes and sudden-onset emergencies. Called "virtual on-site operations coordination centres" (virtual OSOCCs), the system is fed by advanced earthquake monitoring systems such as the United States Geological Survey and the Swiss Geological System. The use of the virtual OSOCC is particularly important for deploying international urban search-and-rescue teams to collapsed structure emergencies, such as earthquakes.

Discussions are currently under way on how to apply this model to other types of disasters, such as cyclones and hurricanes, and ultimately develop a global disaster alert system.

53. National response capabilities are also expected to benefit from the work of the International Federation of the Red Cross on international disaster response laws. This initiative will facilitate the harmonization of frameworks that will help develop models, tools and guidelines for the practical application of laws, rules and principles during international and national disaster response operations. It should also enhance coordination and expedite a prompt response to natural disasters.

54. The aftermath of the Bam earthquake, where reconstruction is lagging and some international supporters of the recovery effort may have withdrawn too early, illustrates that the recovery phase for natural disasters, unlike that for countries emerging from conflict, stands a better chance of benefiting from the support of national authorities, who are often able to take the lead in carrying out recovery and reconstruction activities. The international community, led by the United Nations system, must support the transition from the immediate natural disaster response phase to the longer-term transitional phase and develop programmes and projects that will reduce vulnerability and boost national structures that are able to carry out critical reconstruction activities, particularly in regions that are susceptible to recurring disasters.

55. Finally, action on slow-onset disasters, such as drought, cannot be confined to addressing the symptoms of the disaster through the provision of emergency assistance. The increasing levels of destitution in the Horn of Africa emphasize the importance of addressing the underlying structural causes of food insecurity alongside the provision of humanitarian assistance. A humanitarian disaster due to chronic drought in Ethiopia was averted in 2003 through the combined efforts of the international community and the Government. The number of vulnerable people has since been almost halved. However, an estimated 7.2 million people are still in need of long-term food relief. A coalition on food security has been established in Ethiopia in order to form a partnership between the Government and the donor community to define medium-term solutions to the problems of chronic drought and food insecurity. The Government is committed to improving food security for 5 million chronically food-insecure people, through multi-year safety net programmes.

2. Promoting disaster management and risk reduction capacities

56. As with complex emergencies, the humanitarian consequences of natural disasters are now recognized to be linked to other risk factors, such as poverty, land degradation and HIV/AIDS. It is crucial to target and reduce the growing vulnerability to natural hazards through more integrated disaster management mechanisms, which include comprehensive mapping of disaster hazards and vulnerabilities, strengthening national and regional early warning systems, and active community engagement in risk reduction.

57. Effective disaster management requires the integration of risk reduction into all aspects of development planning. For this reason, vulnerable countries and regions require an improved global understanding of the relationship between development and disaster risk. This information is now available through the global Disaster Risk Index, which measures the relative vulnerability of countries to three

key natural hazards (earthquakes, tropical cyclones and floods) and identifies development factors that contribute to increased risk levels. The key challenge now is to translate analysis into concrete measures aimed at reducing vulnerability to natural disasters, especially in urban areas where a combination of rapid growth, high population density, lack of enforcement of building codes and use of inappropriate building materials render many cities particularly susceptible to increasing risk levels and heavy losses from the impact of natural hazards, such as earthquakes. There is, therefore, an increasing need for city administrations to factor risk reduction concerns consistently into their urban governance approaches and to regulate new construction and the expansion of urban centres in a manner that reduces risk. There is, moreover, a need for the international community to support risk-reduction policies and programmes in urban areas.

58. Good policy choices also depend on good governance, which is increasingly recognized as essential for ensuring that development policy alternatives contribute to managing and reducing disaster risk. In recognition of the role of good governance in disaster risk reduction at all levels, key global initiatives, such as the institutional and legislative systems for disaster reduction and local-level risk management, were launched in 2003. A major element of these initiatives will be the identification of best practices and lessons learned.

59. Efforts to promote and plan capacity-building initiatives can also be constrained by the quality and availability of information. During 2003, the United Nations supported the development of systematic geo-referenced inventories of small, medium and large-scale disasters in Asia to provide systematic tracking of small and medium-scale disaster events, which do not feature in the international headlines.

60. Such efforts emphasize that humanitarian and development organizations should work together more effectively to identify and apply lessons learned in developing local capacity — both for immediate response and for developing institutional and legislative mechanisms to reduce risk more systematically. Lessons learned through these processes must be shared more widely to ensure that Member States are consistently able to avail themselves of the most effective policies and approaches for risk mitigation.

61. In an effort to get disasters and disaster-risk reduction more explicitly integrated into development and humanitarian priorities, the World Conference on Disaster Reduction will be organized in Kobe, Japan, in January 2005. The conference is expected to produce new and specific mechanisms to assist countries and the international community to implement necessary improvements in risk reduction and disaster management.

62. Though the United Nations system is increasingly attempting to build capacity at the national, regional and global levels, programming has not been as extensive or wide-ranging as is needed. This, in no small measure, reflects the comparatively low level of funding provided by donors for capacity-building in disaster reduction and recovery, an amount that is particularly meagre when compared with funding for conflict and post-conflict activities. Disaster-reduction efforts are a key means of saving lives and preserving developmental and financial investments that would otherwise be lost.

IV. Update on common financial tools for emergency response

A. The Central Emergency Revolving Fund

63. The last detailed information provided on the use of the Central Emergency Revolving Fund was contained in a note by the Secretary-General of 28 November 2000 (A/55/649). Subsequently, the General Assembly adopted resolution 56/107 of 14 December 2001, in which it endorsed the proposal of the Secretary-General to expand the use of the Revolving Fund to include humanitarian assistance for natural disasters, humanitarian assistance for new requirements in protracted emergencies and emergency staff security arrangements.

64. As of May 2004, US$ 297.9 million had been disbursed from the Central Emergency Revolving Fund since its inception in May 1992. Of this amount, almost US$ 140 million was disbursed in 2000-2003 alone, because of significant advances made to United Nations agencies. In 2000, 30 advances were made totalling US$ 38.7 million. In 2001, 35 advances were made totalling more than US$ 35 million. In 2002, immediately following the adoption of General Assembly resolution 56/107, more than 37 advances were made and some US$ 58.1 million were disbursed, representing the highest amount ever provided from the Central Emergency Revolving Fund. Almost US$ 25.5 million of this figure was provided to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Food Programme (WFP) to address the effects of the southern African drought, and additional amounts were provided to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) to address urgent drought-related needs in Eritrea. Most of the remaining amount was provided to support new requirements in protracted emergencies in Afghanistan, Burundi, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia and the Sudan, as well as to support agency emergency preparedness and response efforts for Iraq. The extensive use of the Fund in 2002 resulted in its reaching precariously low levels. Though in 2003 disbursements from the Fund declined steeply and only US$ 7.2 million was advanced, part of this amount was used to support United Nations staff safety and security arrangements, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 56/107.

65. The use of the Central Emergency Revolving Fund by United Nations agencies has been uneven over the years. The fluctuation in the number of disbursements is partly a reflection of the constant changes that characterize the global humanitarian environment. However, the fact that in certain years a high number of advances is made from the Fund underlines its importance as a key standby resource mechanism in times of severe emergencies. OCHA will continue to monitor developments in the use of the Fund in the light of General Assembly resolution 56/107 and will continue to inform Member States on its use.

B. Emergency cash grants to countries affected by natural disasters

66. In the immediate aftermath of a natural disaster, the United Nations can provide emergency cash grants of up to US$ 50,000 to countries affected by natural disasters. These grants are particularly effective because they can be used rapidly for the local purchase and delivery of life-saving relief supplies. The cash grant is a critical mechanism that can provide interim funding ahead of the response from the international donor community.

67. The US$ 50,000 ceiling was authorized by the General Assembly in its resolution 38/202 of 20 December 1983. The amount is currently drawn from a total of US$ 1.5 million in funds from the regular budget of the United Nations. However, natural disaster response experiences — most recently those derived from the Bam earthquake — demonstrate that the current ceiling is insufficient. This amount, authorized since 1983, has not changed to reflect the times and is frequently far below what would be effective in the absence of alternative means of immediate relief. A sum of US$ 100,000 per disaster-affected country would be a more useful ceiling in today's context.

V. Observations and recommendations

68. As present humanitarian challenges begin to evolve into peace-building challenges, strong coordination and effective planning among the development, humanitarian, peacekeeping and political actors of the United Nations become more critical. All must work to ensure that a smooth transition is made from conflict to sustainable development. However, the effectiveness of humanitarian assistance and its contribution to the consolidation of peace will continue to be constrained in some emergencies if humanitarian staff are not able to have access to vulnerable populations or maintain an effective presence in crises. Warring parties must recognize the neutral and impartial nature of United Nations humanitarian action. The international humanitarian community must also strengthen its awareness and understanding of local dynamics and work to reassure recipient communities concerning the principles that guide humanitarian action.

69. The tragic consequences of natural disasters were once again visible during the past year. The approach to addressing the future challenges of natural disasters is clear. It is essential to ensure that disaster-risk reduction is more explicitly integrated into development planning. Member States and the United Nations must strengthen efforts to identify more practical ways of channelling resources to support national and regional disaster management capacities. An intended outcome of the World Conference Disaster Reduction to be held in Japan in January 2005 is the production of practical recommendations to assist countries and the international community in implementing necessary improvements to all aspects of disaster management.

70. While these recommendations are awaited, the ones that follow merit consideration.

Humanitarian financing

(a) **The United Nations should be supported by Member States in its efforts to improve common needs assessment and work towards more effective prioritization, including timely testing and reviewing of the CAP Needs Assessment Framework and Matrix.**

(b) **Donors are invited to continue efforts to make available increased amounts of unearmarked, predictable funding for relief assistance, including in the transition phase, and explore means to fund all critical needs across all sectors.**

Transition

(c) Donors should consider ways of applying "good donorship" principles to better address the needs of countries undergoing a transition from relief to development.

(d) Member States are encouraged to support and fund the development and implementation of new integrated programming tools, such as the 4Rs, to facilitate the transition from relief to development.

Gender

(e) Humanitarian organizations should strengthen their efforts to integrate a gender perspective into the planning, programming and implementation of humanitarian activities.

HIV/AIDS in emergencies

(f) Member States should support the integration of HIV/AIDS responses into the planning, programming and implementation of humanitarian action by ensuring linkages between humanitarian, development and HIV/AIDS mechanisms and by using the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Guidelines for HIV/AIDS Interventions in Emergency Settings.

Protection from sexual exploitation and abuse

(g) Member States should consider ways to ensure that efforts within the United Nations system to address the problem of sexual exploitation and abuse in armed conflict are reinforced by concrete actions to promote similar standards of behaviour for uniformed personnel serving under United Nations auspices.

Internally displaced persons

(h) Member States and United Nations agencies should be encouraged to contribute actively to the implementation of the collaborative approach in order to promote an improved and more effective response to the needs and rights of internally displaced persons.

(i) Affected Member States should consider making use of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement to strengthen their legal frameworks for the protection of internally displaced persons.

Humanitarian presence

(j) The United Nations should stress the importance of ensuring that staff are sensitive to national and local customs and traditions in their countries of assignment.

(k) United Nations agencies should seek to address security risks to humanitarian staff by promoting and enhancing collaborative actions.

(l) United Nations humanitarian organizations should be requested to carry out an in-depth examination of the effect that perception may have on humanitarian operations in the context of a military presence.

(m) The United Nations should engage in dialogue with States and humanitarian actors on the respective roles of and complementarity among humanitarian, political and peacekeeping actors in response to crises.

(n) The United Nations should further develop civil-military guidance to reflect the changing operational environment and to promote greater dialogue between civil and military actors on their respective roles and responsibilities.

Natural disasters

(o) Member States should provide the necessary resources to facilitate rapid response by local authorities and humanitarian agencies in disaster-affected areas.

(p) Member States should channel increased resources to capacity-building activities in disaster-prone areas particularly to address the dynamics and disproportionate risks that natural disasters pose in urban environments.

(q) Member States should re-emphasize the importance of natural disaster mitigation efforts by ensuring proper building codes, reinforcing existing structures and strengthening disaster management practices of vulnerable countries.

(r) Member States are requested to endorse the recommendation to raise the maximum limit of an emergency cash grant to US$ 100,000 per country in the case of any one disaster, within the existing resources available from the regular budget.

(s) Member States should support the ongoing preparations for the World Conference on Disaster Reduction, to be held from 18 to 22 January 2005 in Kobe, Japan, and ensure that that opportunity is used to reaffirm and strengthen disaster-reduction policy.

Notes

[1] www.idpproject.org.

[2] www.humanitarianinfo.org.

[3] ST/SGB/2003/13.

[4] Adopted by the Security Council in December 2003 (S/PRST/2003/27, annex).

[5] E/CN.4/1998/53/Add.2, annex.